

**Testimony of Dellena Hoyer-Johnson**  
**Representing the Effort, Inc.**  
**April 25, 2002**

My name is Dellena Hoyer-Johnson. I have used heroin, crack, cocaine, meth, and alcohol -- anything was my drug of choice.

My life:

Until I was seven, I grew up with eleven brothers and sisters. My parents, living on welfare, were physically and sexually abusive to me and to my siblings. I was removed from my biological family when I was 7. I started my addiction when I was eight with cigarettes and sniffing finger nail polish. By the time I was eleven, I was drinking, taking speed-like diet pills and having sex. I started prostituting when I was thirteen to support my habit --and because I had a pimp who put me on the streets who also had a heroin habit, I continued that life by running away from foster homes and group homes. When I was fourteen, I had my first child by that pimp who is now doing a life sentence for killing someone in a robbery to get his drugs. By the time I was sixteen, I was snorting heroin. And, by the time I was eighteen, I was on welfare. I was also smoking crack, snorting cocaine and heroin, drinking alcohol regularly and prostituting to support the habit. My son didn't go to school regularly because I was too high to get up and send him. Most of his young life, he had to take care of himself. I was arrested an average of 62 times per year for many years. I also had a second baby who was born with cocaine in his system. For twelve years, my oldest boy watched me get beat up every day by the man I was with at the time, who was also an addict. My oldest son was put into foster care until he was eighteen. The police were called out at least three to four time a week on domestic abuse.

I started to attempt to get into a drug treatment program when I was eighteen. The first time, I waited two months before I got in to the Effort Detoxification Program. The waiting was very difficult because I never knew when I would be called to come in. Sometimes when the program did call, I wouldn't go because of circumstances with my kids, or because I had spent the co-payment on drugs. I also didn't want to go because I was afraid of being sick from kicking heroin and I was afraid of the unknown. But I still couldn't stop using no matter how bad I wanted to. Even knowing I could lose my kids didn't make me stop using.

At my first admission, I stayed seven days and left. I went back to the same people and places and started using drugs within twenty-four hours. I went back to Detox eleven times to kick heroin addiction. I would stay five to seven days -- when my medication schedule was done, I would leave within twenty-four hours. Even though the counselors would always try to talk me into entering a long-term residential treatment program, I refused because I didn't think I was that bad. I thought I was different because I only snorted heroin. Little did I know that residential treatment was exactly what I needed. I was desperate, and I didn't have anywhere to go. I had burnt all my bridges. I had been

kicked out of the homeless shelters and the battered women's shelters from here to Placerville because I couldn't stop using. My last bout with treatment was in 1991 at a residential treatment facility here in Sacramento. I had to wait three weeks to get in because there was no bed available I called the treatment program every day -- two and three times a day begging them to let me in because I knew I was hurting my children and myself and that I was going to die if I didn't get help soon I was so desperate but I wasn't sure what to do.

And now, I have been clean and sober for ten and one half years. When I began my life in recovery, I owed \$13,000 for my son being in foster care. I have paid it all back. I owed \$3000 for my son being in juvenile hall. I have paid it all back. I have paid all of my past due income taxes, and I now look forward to being able to purchase my own home.

My treatment program cost the taxpayer approximately \$4,500. I relapsed once after 90-days. I used for two days only and have been celebrating my recovery ever since. My life is more than I ever imagined. I am now married, and I have been working for the past 10 years. I enjoy my life with my children and my grandchildren, teaching them and others about addiction. My life is dedicated to helping other people with all the issues related to addiction.